The Job Never Ends

ONCE upon a time a woman wrote a book called "The Dangerous Age," in which she set forth the claim that this fearful period for a woman lay between the ages of forty and fifty: When her time for bringing children into the world was ended, and before she had become reconciled to a graceful and gradual, but tragic, disappearance into a chimney corner. Dangerous, because she felt there was nothing in life left for her now that the children no longer were dependent upon her.

"The difficulties besetting a woman of that age," said Miss Grace Potter, who as a psychoanalist is a consultant with physicians in helping men and women find a harmonious adjustment with life, thereby improving in health and spirits, "are put upon her by custom instead of by nature.

"If, during her life, she has regarded child-bearing as the one task that was hers, and therefore has made no social contributions to life, she begins to have trouble. It may express itself in some physical ill or ailment, sometimes to a dangerous degree. Or mental disorders follow, which her friends translated in the beginning as 'worry,' but which gradually grew to the extent of making a consultation with a physician necessary.

"There is a reason for this physical or mental trouble that goes deeper into the one physicians have given for centuries. The Bible says, 'By the sweat of thy brow thou shalt earn thy bread.' And this is something more than a moral law in the usual sense. It is a statement of a fact. He who 'sweats' may eat and be at peace. He who idles must pay some time.

"True, she has borne children. She has done the world a great service. Some might think her job is done, and now she can fold her hands. The job is never done, and the folding of the hands in idleness results in mental and physical ills. The memory of what she has done will not keep her happy or well. For, see, if child-bearing is all she was meant for, her life is ended at fifty. Why then, is it, that, ripe with experience, and having a knowledge of life that is invaluable, the woman who has reached the age when she is of most value to the world begins of a sudden to be a sorrow to herself and to her family?

"She is restless and unhappy if she has had no job but babies because she feels that her work is done while she is still mentally and physically able to do something more. She often hasn't the remotest idea why she is unhappy or sick, or both, but yields to the tradition which says it is her 'age.' What would a man feel like who, hired until he was about fifty, at the end of that time were told he was of no use to the world?

"No," she continued, "I do not agree that, having brought children into life, a woman's sole future task is to care for them. Every boy or girl of fifteen should have begun to care for him, or herself. The child has his problems; he must learn to face them. When a mother continues to relieve a child of responsibility she weakens him.

"It is this predisposition of mothers to map out every step a child should take to save him from stumbling; this desire to have the child follow in the safe, well-beaten footprints of his parents, and along the same path, that makes the child finally resent family love as interference. Boys and girls want a chance for self-decision and self-expression.

"It is natural they should. Otherwise they'll never be fit for the struggle with the world. The mother bird teaches her babies to fly; in this detachment human beings are not so wise.

"It is a mistaken idea, too, that a woman who has devoted fifty years of life to domestic problems cannot take up new work. Often, until about forty, she represses the unconscious desire to do more than housework and raising children, because custom and circumstances have said she must. Then, naturally, her whole personality rises in indignation when the realization comes that the job is gone. But as this want for other work has been fiercely represented, the personality doesn't even know what it is indignant about.

"When a hungry baby cries, we won't say the child is suffering with swollen cheeks and watery eyes. We say the baby is hungry and must be fed. It is just as true that the indigestion or nervous troubles of an adult woman may come from soul hunger as that the baby's swollen cheeks come from crying for milk.

"The woman would know this if she had not repressed her desire for world work so long. But the eagerness with which she accepts this explanation and adjusts herself to doing something she is specially fitted for, thereby losing her distressing mental and physical ails, is proof of the correctness of this theory. The adjustment doesn't take place in a day, or in a month, but the woman who takes up a work as engrossing as the care of her babies used to be, finds it in time. Women of fifty can take up new tasks if they will. It is the only way to prove there is no 'dangerous age.' There are women writers, women sculptors, women artists—women who have been engaged in some work like this all their lives—they know of no 'dangerous age.' It is because their occupation goes along with their years.

"There is only one way: women must change conditions so that they may bear their babies and continue, though intermittently at times, to hold their fingers on some interesting activity outside of domestic interests. Then no one could say their life work ended at fifty.

"No woman should wait till she is fifty to find this opportunity for expression. This should be done before she is twenty-five. But she may begin at fifty, if necessary and tens of thousands of women are doing it. Many found during the war that they passed an unpleasant period without unpleasant consequences: It was because they had something to do that engrossed their minds.

"Along that line and along no other, lies all elimination of the so-called 'dangerous age.'"

MISS GRACE POTTER

How One Lady of Letters Made Good—By H. O. BISHOP

WHEN a stranger goes to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and makes inquiry as to what the place is noted for, the response is invariably the same—no matter whether it be from a banker, hodcarrier, preacher, saleslady, society girl or newsboy: "Why you must live a long distance from here! Don't you know that Bethlehem is the home town of Miss Katherine Haviland Taylor, the famous writer?" This is said to you in such a pitying sort of way as to make you feel quite ashamed of your ignorance.

When such response was received by the writer he naturally decided that such unanimous fame was worth investigating. Miss Taylor was found in a cozy workroom at her mother's residence, hammering away on a typewriter putting the finishing touches on an exciting detective story.

Years of experience had convinced the interviewer that most professional women are not in the habit of devoting any too much time to dressmakers and hairdressers. He was therefore wholly unprepared for the appearance of Bethlehem's lady of letters. She at once gives the impression of being the girl who tells the editors of fashion magazines how to run their jobs successfully. In other words, this brilliant lass is the personification of neatness and exquisiteness of dress—knowing exactly how and what to wear. But what is still more noticeable, is the pleasing fact that she is just as particular about the grooming of the inside of her head as the outside.

KATHERINE HAVILAND TAYLOR

"Miss Taylor, they tell me you have written a record-breaking number of poems, short stories and novels during the past year and a half, and that magazine editors and book publishers grab them up as fast as you turn them out. Won't you please tell me how you happened to break into the writing game and to what you attribute the chief reasons for your remarkable success?"

"Energy and discontent," she answered quickly. "I know that the latter isn't very nice to admit, but—I'm never satisfied. I always want a better sale than my last one, and—a bigger check."

"What made you apply your energy to this particular sort of work?" I asked.

"I suppose because I failed at everything else," she replied, then laughed suddenly. "Simply numb when it comes to doing the proper society stunts," she admitted. "I hate them. One day I went calling (I always go on fair days when I think people will motor) and I attacked the house of a woman I had seen (or thought I'd seen) down town. When she herself admitted me, I exploded an 'Oh, I thought you were out!' I never could fix that up, and she had lovely dinners. Sad, wasn't it!"

"Inspiration?" she echoed, to another question of mine. She turned, ran her long, slim fingers across the keys of her writer, shook her head. "Don't believe in it," she asserted. "Wouldn't our jobs be wonderfully easy, if it came up and shook hands with you every morning?"

I agreed.

"When I paid my income tax," she went on, "the collector, who was evidently not deeply impressed with our smoky, small town, said, 'You never got the inspiration to earn that here!' And I told him my inspiration consisted in coaling up my energy with hours of typing—that I made myself go with that steam.

"I believe in hard work," she said, "in six to eight hours a day; and—here, my friend, lies the first step toward success—in writing with an eye to the particular magazine. I handle all my own business, and like doing it, but it makes a pretty busy life, since letters play a large part in my particular sort of selling."

"Do you believe in women having careers?" I asked.

"Always," she responded. "But the biggest and finest career for any woman, to my thinking, is marriage."

"Then why——" I asked gently, leaving the rest for her to interpret.

"Perhaps 'Nobody asked me, Sir'," she said, but I very much doubted it. At my expression of this, she adroitly turned the subject, and I found that her education had come through private schools and travel, that she'd lived in London, and Italy, but preferred, always would prefer, her own, which is the dear United States.

She was born in Minnesota, says she is fond of the romance languages and the study of pictures, that she believes music and art should be a part of everyone's life, and that it's a moral duty to have as good a time as possible as you go along.

"Success," she repeated after me, as I questioned her again. "Well, let me see." She paused a moment, then spoke quickly. "I feel sure," she said, "that it lies not in answering when opportunity knocks, but in going out and hitting anything that looks like opportunity over the head with your particular sort of a mallet."

"Where are you going to put this story?" she asked, as I arose to go. I told her and she expressed approval. "I like that periodical," she said, and then, "Come to see me again some time. It is splendid to see a man who doesn't want to sell me a typewriter or some oil stock——And, will you let me send you a copy of my next novel, which is coming out in June? I shall be charmed to do so and I hope that you may be able to regard it as a reward for all your trouble."

She held out her hand, I took it, felt the very firm pressure of it, and reluctantly departed.

As I reached the door her already hammering typewriter stopped its noise. She called me and I hoped that the interview would be continued but all she said was, "Does an E or an A go in the last part of recalcitrant?" I told her that I generally used an E, but that A was correct. She commenced banging away on that machine again. "Thank you," she said absently, "Good bye," and I knew that I was off for Washington on the next train.

At the house raisings on the Island of Rugen (a Prussian possession) the girls and children take part with the men, the girls mixing mortar, carrying brick, etc. The houses are so well constructed that they last for several generations.